



Figures as  
ancestors,  
a manner of col-  
lecting the collec-  
tions of concerns.

## What is our library?

“Topic. (...) I took the word ‘Neutral’, insofar as its referent inside me is a stubborn affect, for a series of walks along a certain number of reading that is the procedure of the topics: a grid over the surface of which on moves a ‘subject’. Notice that the topical method is not as archaic an approach as it would seem: all the current ‘committed’ discourses uses it: just take one of today’s manna words, ‘power’, pair it with any other word and advertise: ‘Power and Unconscious’, ‘Power and Sexuality’, “Power and Still Life”, etc. However I hope that my topic is not so manic, for I took the Neutral for a walk not along the grid of words but along a network of readings, which is to say, of a library. “ This claim of the impossible exhaustivity of sources is going against the alleged exhaustivity of history. The history we make to summarize the collections of fragments are building up the context of our practice our *récit* of architecture. Doing the exegesis of our history is only the action of reporting its parts. *De architectura* of Vitruvius is the canonical exemple, claimed by both engineers (nowadays armies of engineers have for sole knowledge of pre-modernity the holy formula of *utilitas, firmitas, venustas*, ideaa that have been put into the word ‘progress’) and architects, is deploying the art of practice of building with the eye of a subject. The miracle of Vitruvius recovery gave the whole framework for architecture summarized history, arguably the miracle is that none other treatise predates it. The purified stories of the temple, the primitive hut, that proliferated through the modern gun of Gutenberg reproduction are images of the past. May Aby Warburg, the art historian reminds us how images are safe only if you learn how to jump from one image to the next. The interesting thing in word is that it allows the illusion of essence or reduction, in a good way, of past history into regions of knowledge. Barthes in his course, uses a personal library where the ‘loss of methodological rigor is compensated for by the intensity”.

“Unfortunately, much like the Tower of Babel, those “palaces of reason” – to use the name of many city halls in northern Italy – are no longer

able to house the issues they were supposed to gather. Commentators on the “events” of May 1968 in France were amused to see that the turbulent demonstrating crowds passed by the National Assembly without even looking at it, as if its irrelevance was so great that it could not even invite abuses. How irrelevant they might seem now that the global has become the new name of the Body Politik. Where would you assemble the global? Certainly not under golden domes and kitsch frescoes where heroic senators and half-naked Republics are crowned by laurels descending from clouds. Why are politics always about imitation? There is Robespierre imitating Cicero, Lenin mimicking Robespierre. In the name of the common good, forests of Greek columns have been erected across the Western world – while the “mother of parliaments” in Westminster remained faithful to the dark, cramped, uncomfortable cave of stalls, spires and gargoyles. Neo-gothic, neo-classic, neo-modern or neo-postmodern, those spaces were all “neo,” that is, trying to imitate some venerated past. But you might need more than imitation to build the new political assemblies. Covering the Reichstag with a transparent dome – in effect, fully opaque – as Foster did, doesn’t seem nearly enough to absorb the new masses that are entering political arenas. (...) What would a political space be that would not be “neo”? What would a truly contemporary style of assembly look like? ”<sup>1</sup>

Fragments as representation of parties towards a whole.

There is no concepts in the fragments. This is here that we have been talking about vaguely along this essay without defining it. Barthes in the Neutral defines ‘a series or sequence of fragments’ each of which I has

1.

From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik - or How to Make Things Public. In Making Things Public.

given a title, 'these are figures of the neutral'. Figures are answering to the equation {(operating as rhetorical a circle piece of discourse, identifiable since titleable) + (face that as an 'air', an 'expression')}. "They are not on the theme of Neutral but in which, more vaguely, there is some Neutral, a little like the rebus of our childhood" In other words this is a discontinuous exposition, that he inability to 'construc't a development or course. "Inability or disgust? Who can distinguish between inability and the lack of taste? Perhaps my reasons, just alibis?"<sup>2</sup> These fragments in time and space are a useful network for the theoreticians but also for the historians, because to certain extent with history we are merely gluing pieces together.

As Barthes would put "each figure is at the same time search for the Neutral and *performance* of the Neutral" and this is exactly how we think buildings through other buildings. As in the collection 'Metropolitan Architecture'<sup>3</sup>, 20 Japanese individual houses have been used actively as what we call 'ancestors' as the recognition that nothing is created but is following a blood stream of ideas. Ancestors are non wordy fragments bringing ideas in the obvious manner of what has been actually made without the discourse they've been pulled from. Barthes' sidenotes to that quote states '≠ demonstration' meaning exactly this: without what is around to convince us let's see (*-monstration*) how well this building performs in how it is supposed to do. The most interesting thing with the Neutral may be in the attitude rather than content, at the same time we are collectively looking for aforementioned 'topic' into a building and put our confidence into that building to perform at the said 'topic'.

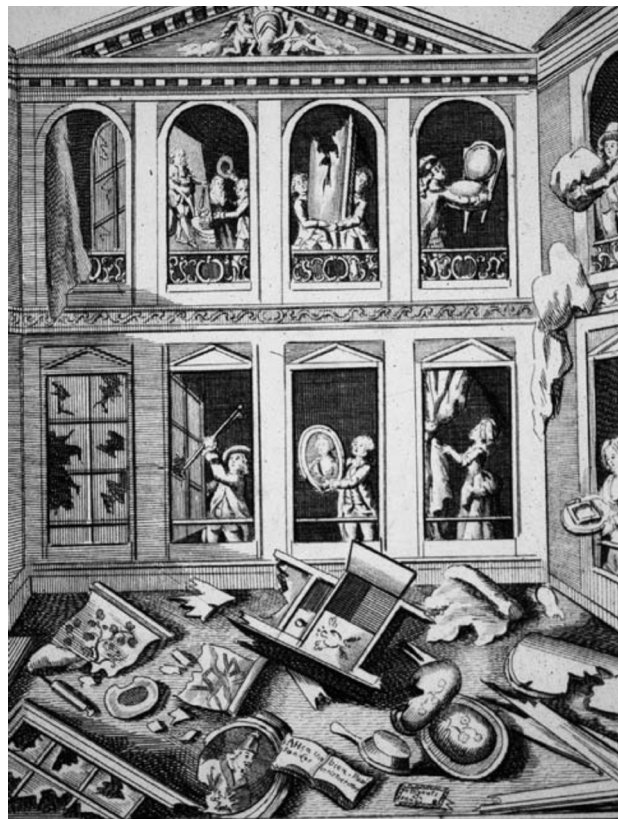
The parts are brought together in a collection that is context for the project. This a lot alike Venturi's attitude in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* 'I make no special attempt to relate architecture to other things. I have not tried to "improve the connections between science and technology on the one hand, and the humanities and the social sciences on the other (...). I try to talk

2.

The Neutral, Session of February 18, 1978

3.

FORM, Architecture Without Content 17&18 – Metropolitan Architecture, Lausanne : EPFL-ENAC- SAR, 2015-2016.



about architecture rather than around it.”<sup>4</sup> The temptation here is to start purifying the fragments into their paradigmatic aspect that make them part of a discourse, yet again, that of the Architect in the human society or that of the technological array of tools that have been installed. A, almost premodern, whole that rather than being an absolute systemic idea that can be designed from the pipe up to the street but rather one that at the same time sees the complexity of its parts and is judged by its ability to perform as a whole.

Barthes would say in his course that the Neutral is difficult or that there is a ‘difficult Neutral’ just as a ‘difficult whole’.

#### How we progress, comparison and gradient.

From the idea a parties and whole lies therein a progression —at least in the small assembly of a studio or practice— in the direction of good ‘answers’ to have in mind. Heinrich Wölfflin used a double carousel projector to his give art history course, in such, of course was he able to show two things at a time but also it allowed active comparison among the collectivity of his classroom. To compare projects the double is a clear track to spot the differences of two buildings and the addition of doubles is a way of ordaining them into a mental map in the manner of the method of *loci*. In our case we try to *unthread* the solutions of a project in regard to the problem of mediation with its inner preoccupation and outer environment as a ordaining framework of shared attributes or features. The cognitive scientists have created the term of ‘feature engineering’ for ‘the process of using domain knowledge of the data to create features that make predictive models work’<sup>5</sup> Luckily we are not in a predictive field —not yet — but this is a good metaphor to start with if we ask ourselves: “What are the features we use from the domain of our collective collections to make the project work? How do we chose which feature

4.

Venturi, Robert in the preface of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. 2nd ed.

5.

[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feature\\_engineering](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feature_engineering)] Accessed December 18, 2016.

is relevant? What would a feature architecture look like?” Typology, a subdomain of the broader feature ensemble, is already following a clear mechanical protocol, in such typologies tend to follow the same path as semiologists: they fade away into their worlds because they don’t need anyone else. The exegesis of the arranged collection has to come to terms with the ‘performance’ of an architecture in mediation.

“To describe, to unthread what? The nuances. In fact, I would want, if it were in my power, to look at the figure-words (beginning with the Neutral) with a skimming gaze that would make the nuances come out (increasingly rare commodity, true displaced luxury of language; in Greek = *diaphora*, a Nietzschean word)<sup>6</sup>. Make no mistake: this is not about intellectual sophistication. What I am looking for, during the preparation of this course, is an introduction to living, a guide to life (ethical project): I want to live according to nuance. Now, there is a teacher of nuance, literature: (1) Literature: codex of nuances + (2) Semiology: listening to or watching nuance.” This works well with the grayscale of quasi-objects of the black science and white society pictures under our eyes. Indeed the so called black and white image is nothing more than an infinite variation of grey points building the structure of the image where only the minute minority is really the claimed white or the claimed black.

6.

Here Barthes is making reference to “Schopenhauer as Educator” where Nietzsche is using ‘Adiaphora’ as indifferent things. Diaphrology, the study nuance and shimmer is a big part of Barthes’ bibliography.

### The ultimate fragment.

From our collection we are presented with features for a meaningful architecture, that of the inside|outside—even in a world where there is no outside anymore—paradigm, of life support. “The idiom of matters of concern reclaims matter, matters and materiality and renders them into something that can and must be carefully redesigned. This might be far from the humanists’ limited view of what humans are, but it is every bit as removed from the post human dreams of cyborgs. What is clear is





that the collective definition of what artificial life supports are supposed to be becomes the key site of politically minded investigation. Nothing much is left of the scenography of the modernist theory of action: no male hubris, no mastery, no appeal to the outside, no dream of expatriation in an outside space which would not require any life support of any sort, no nature, no grand gesture of radical departure —and yet still the necessity of re-doing everything once again in a strange combination of conservation and innovation that is unprecedented in the short history of modernism. Will Prometheus ever be cautious enough to redesign the planet? “<sup>7</sup> The despised and weary Promethean hubristic dream, modern ethos are to be neutralized by a more cautious virtue of vitality that both Venturi and Barthes advocate for: “The increasing dimension and scale of architecture in urban and regional planning add to the difficulties. I welcome the problems and exploit the uncertainties. By embracing contradiction as well as complexity, I aim for *vitality* as well as validity.”<sup>8</sup> “What can be done is to drift by displacing the paradigm. For ‘virility’, or for the lack of virility, I would be tempted to substitute vitality. There is a vitality of of the Neutral: the Neutral plays on the razor’s edge: in the will-to-live but outside of the will-to-possess”<sup>9</sup> The vitality that is claimed in these lines is our antidote to the cold grand schemes of matter of facts, the same facts that nobody can really grasp. Instead matter of concerns in the ‘will-to-live’ is linking us to a whole (new) story of Spherology.

In his *Sphären* trilogy the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk is proposing another relationship between human beings and the whole. He is telling us that Heidegger not only forgot Being but also to tell us where is it exactly that we are ‘thrown into the world’. “Naked humans are as rare as naked cosmonauts. To define humans is to define the envelopes, the life support systems, the *Umwelt* that make it possible for them to breathe. (...)in the same way as a space suit or a space station is entirely artificially and carefully designed, so are all of the envelopes that constitutes the fragile life supports of humans.”<sup>10</sup> The

7.

Latour, Bruno.  
“A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps toward a Philosophy of Design (with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk).”

8.

Venturi, Robert.  
Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture. 2nd ed., preface.

9.

Barthes, Roland in  
the Neutral, session  
of March 18, 1978

10.

Latour, Bruno.  
“A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps toward a Philosophy of Design (with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk).”

negative theology of Sloterdijk is placing humans back in their ‘wombs in which they are grown all the way to the place where they survive and die.’<sup>11</sup> *The Garden of Earthly Delights* the triptych of Hieronymus Bosch like other Flemish altarpieces is a five-surface triptych closing-up. The inner painting itself is describing in an all-over colorful landscape our ‘internal Hell’<sup>12</sup> and at the same time the use of rich colors is indicating how much the work is embedded in the framework of upper class in the Middle age economy. But once closed the picture is not the same, what’s left for the poor devout; that is nowadays what’s left for the Commons? “Environment with the first rain, first trees and bushes” as in the third days of Creation — or is it after Doomsday? A grayscale “panoramic landscape, bounded by a stretch of water, with heavy cloud”<sup>13</sup> circumscribed by a transparent sphere our very own *Umwelt*. The closed altarpiece is our survival, it’s been here since the beginning and what awaits if we don’t assemble; also it is exactly what we’ve been doing ever since.

The fragments of Barthes, the bubbles of Sloterdijk, the *pars (pro toto)*<sup>14</sup> of Venturi are strategies that take their own authors’ survival at stake. In that sense the Neutral is not a theme but a posture towards the ultimate fragment — which has always been here and at the same time the missing one: *Manifold*.

Architecture as a metaphorical sphere of ‘life supports’ is a promising idea of *vitality* once combined with the mediation of the neutral. Let’s unfold this altarpiece of ours by describing its inner parts, compound and environment in the form and theory of this *Manifold*.

11.

Ibid.

12.

Latour, Bruno.  
From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik - or How to Make Things Public.

13.

Barthes, Roland.  
The Neutral, Color fragment, Session of March 11, 1978

14.

Geers Kersten,  
Pančevac Jelena,  
and Zanderigo  
Andrea in the preface of *The Difficult Whole*



# The Neutral

